

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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SUBJECT: LIBERIA-SIERRA LEONE CUSTOMS UNION PROPOSED

REF: A. TOAID A-052 OF APRIL 27, 1973

B. MONROVIA 0250 OF JANUARY 16, 1973

1. ANOTHER TENTATIVE STEP TOWARD LIBERIA-SIERRA LEONE ECONOMIC COOPERATION WAS TAKEN AT THIRD JOINT MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE HELD MONROVIA SEPTEMBER 12-14 FOLLOWING MEETING "TECHNICAL EXPERTS" SEPTEMBER 10-11. MINISTER PLANNING AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS D. FRANKLIN NEAL (FOR LIBERIA) AND MINISTER DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC PLANNING S.A.J. PRATT (FOR SIERRA LEONE) AGREED THAT DESIRED BILATERAL COOPERATION COULD BEST BE ACHIEVED WITHIN FRAMEWORK OF CUSTOMS UNION PROVIDING FOR COMPLETE LIBERALIZATION TRADE IN LOCAL GOODS. DRAFT DECLARATION OF "MANO RIVER UNION", ESTABLISHING CUSTOMS UNION, JOINT SECRETARIAT AND CUSTOMS TRAINING SCHOOL, TO BE SUBMITTED TO HEADS OF STATE FOR SIGNATURE ON DATE TO BE ARRANGED.

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2. PROPOSED CUSTOMS UNION, JOINT SECRETARIAT, AND CUSTOMS SCHOOL SAID TO BE AMONG RECOMMENDATIONS OF U.N. INTERDISCIPLINARY MISSION (UNCATAD, FAO, UNIDO) WHICH EARLIER REVIEWED PROPOSALS FOR LIBERIA-SIERRA LEONE COOPERATION IN TRADE, INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE AT REQUEST GOL AND GOSL. IF PROJECT APPROVED BY BOTH GOVERNMENTS, UNDP PROPOSES PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO JOINT SECRETARIAT IN FORM TECHNICAL ADVISORS IN TRADE POLICY, CUSTOMS AND EXCISE ARRANGEMENTS NECESSARY FOR CUSTOMS UNION, AND COORDINATED BILATERAL EXPORT PROMOTION PROGRAMS DURING PERIOD 1974-76.

3. COMMENT: WHILE WE CONSIDER IT PROBABLE THAT DECLARATION OF "MAO RIVER UNION" WILL BE SIGNED, POSSIBLY BY JANUARY 1974 TARGET DATE SUGGESTED BY U.N. INTERDISCIPLINARY MISSION FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF JOINT SECRETARIAT, WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE RAPID PROGRESS TOWARD MEANINGFUL UNION. "POLITICAL WILL" TOWARD REGIONAL COOPERATION, SO OFTEN CITED BY GOL, MAY NOT PROVE EQUAL TO TASKS OF RESOLVING BASIC PROBLEMS OF UNION, SUCH AS DEPENDENCE BOTH COUNTRIES ON IMPORT TARIFFS FOR REVENUE, COMPETITION FOR NEW INDUSTRY, AND DIFFERING TRADE ORIENTATION (I.E., SIERRA LEONE'S POSSIBLE ASSOCIATION WITH EEC, LIBERIA'S "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP" WITH U.S.). MOREOVER, SHORT-TERM IMPACT OF EVEN TOTAL TRADE LIBERALIZATION BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES WOULD BE MINOR. THEIR ECONOMICS ARE NOT COMPLEMENTARY AND PRESENT BILATERAL TRADE IS MINIMAL. 1972 LIBERIAN EXPORTS TO SIERRA LEONE VALUED AT \$76,308 OF WHICH MOST WERE RE-EXPORTS OF THIRD COUNTRY PRODUCTS. IMPORTS FROM SIERRA LEONE SAME YEAR VALUED AT \$430,140, BUT SEVERAL LEAD ITEMS (BREAD, PASTRY, ANIMAL FEEDS, CLOTHING) FACE INCREASING COMPETITION FROM LIBERIAN INDUSTRY. STILL, ANY MOVEMENT TOWARD INTEGRATION SMALL AND FRAGILE WEST AFRICAN NATIONAL MARKETS CAN ONLY BE GAIN, AND SHOULD BE WELCOMED. MANFULL

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